Cedar Chemical, West Helena, AR

The Cedar Chemical Corporation (CCC) West Helena Plant is located to the south of Helena and West Helena, Arkansas. The plant is located on 48 acres of the Helena-West Helena Industrial Park, approximately one and one-quarter mile southwest of the intersection of U.S. Highway 49 and State Highway 242. The plant is bordered by farms, State Highway 242, the Union-Pacific Railway, and other industrial park properties. Residential areas are located within one-half mile to the southwest and northeast of the CCC site.

The CCC plant property is divided into two major areas: the manufacturing area and the wastewater treatment system area. Agricultural and organic chemicals, including insecticides, herbicides, polymers, and organic intermediates were manufactured within six production units at the facility. Production Units 1 and 4 manufactured various custom products, Production Unit 2 produced propanil, Production Unit 5 manufactured nitroparaffin derivatives, and Production Unit 6 produced dichloroaniline. Production Unit 3 manufactured herbicides (RP-10), benzene sulfonyl chloride, alkylated phenol, and methylthiopinacolone oxide (MTPO) until it was destroyed in an explosion and fire on September 26, 1989. Chemical processing at the production units included alkylation, amidation, carbamoylation, chlorination, distillation, esterification, acid and base hydrolysis, and polymerization. In addition to chemical production, plant activities included product formulation and packaging.

In 1972, the facility began dumping waste chemicals into three unlined earthen ponds surrounded by berms at the site. The dimensions of two of the ponds were approximately 120 feet by 150 feet. These two ponds were used for waste disposal. The third pond was approximately 120 feet by 30 feet, and limestone was added to this pond for acid neutralization. Wash water from chemical formation operations was also discharged to these ponds. The disposal of wastes in the ponds was discontinued around 1977. A wastewater treatment system was constructed at the facility in 1977 for treatment of wastewater formerly discharged to the ponds. The wastewater treatment system consisted of an API separator, flow equalization basin, aeration basin, two clarifiers, and a polish pond. In 1978, the ponds were closed by pumping the water from the ponds and installing a clay/bentonite cap over them.

A RCRA Facility Investigation (RFI) (1996) and Risk Assessment (RA) (2001 and 2002) have been completed for the site and the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) agreed that CCC should proceed to the corrective measure study (CMS) phase of remedial action. However, the process was interrupted by a CCC bankruptcy, and the site has been relinquished to the State of Arkansas and is now under the control of ADEQ. Manufacturing operations were shut down on March 8, 2002; however, the wastewater treatment facility remains operational.

EPA Region 6 conducted several sampling events at Cedar Chemical between 2004 and 2006 where soil, groundwater and sediment samples were collected both onsite and offsite to help assess the environmental conditions at and around the facility. The facility was found to have

high concentrations of site contaminants in soil, sediment and groundwater. The surface soils and subsurface soils are contaminated with pesticides, volatile organics, and heavy metals. The onsite surface water bodies and groundwater are contaminated with volatile organics and heavy metals. Sediments are contaminated with pesticides and heavy metals. Approximately, Eighty (80) Solid Waste Management Units (SWMUs) (including approx. 30 sumps and 10 drum storage/drum crushing areas) have been identified onsite. A 1,2-DCA plume was found to extend from the center of the process area on the north side of the facility to approximately one mile off site and downgradient of the CCC facility. 1,2-DCA was found in offsite agricultural wells at a concentration as high as 21,700 ppb.

Since that time ADEQ has issued an order to newly identified responsible parties (RPs) to conduct additional site investigation and cleanup. At this point the investigation has been completed by the RP; however they refuse to commit to any cleanup activities. ADEQ has petitioned EPA Region 6 to place the site on the NPL seeking enforcement and cleanup assistance.


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